Evaluation of Danida support to development research, 2008-2018

Summary, management response & follow up note, 6th May 2020

This note summarises the main findings and conclusions of an evaluation of Danida support to development research undertaken from June 2019 to February 2020. The note includes the management response and follow up proposals drafted by the Evaluation, Learning and Quality (ELK) department. EVAL (now ELK) commissioned and managed the evaluation, which was carried out by an independent team of international consultants working with FCG-Sweden.

The evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation is to help shape future support to development research; conducting and encouraging high quality, useful research that strengthens capacities and knowledge for development. Overseen by an independent commission, the evaluation encompassed assessment of grants of just over DKK 1.99 billion for 378 projects executed in 49 countries through seven major funding channels over a period of 11 years, from 2008 to 2018.[1]

Responding to twenty evaluation questions in the terms of reference and guided by four evaluation criteria - relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact - the team combined a mixed methods and systems-informed design with a number of different methods that included case studies in Ghana, Uganda and Vietnam. There was a strong focus on factors that have influenced the performance of the portfolio and it's development impact. Eight guiding principles and a quality assurance process helped to enhance credibility. The evaluation experienced some limitations that affected the depth to which certain analyses could be undertaken; primarily lack of consolidated portfolio and trends data, lost institutional memory and insufficient time for intensive systematic portfolio analysis and impact tracing.

Assessment of the portfolio

Danida – represented by EVAL, the Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC) and the Consultative Committee for Development Research (FFU) – has done very well in support of research for development within the boundaries set by its mandate, linkages with development cooperation and limited resources as relatively small international donor. It has supported many valuable, high quality research projects, the vast majority aimed at pertinent opportunities to address development challenges in low-income countries. The low budget allocation of under 1% of the development cooperation budget confirms that development research has a low profile and priority, indicating an under-appreciation of the importance of knowledge-driven development in the South and of the value of such support for Denmark.[2]

It has been a challenge to defend and direct the portfolio of grants without a guiding strategy and accompanying strategic tracking of grants and portfolio with nuanced, consolidated progress

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[1] Poul Engberg-Pedersen chaired the Evaluation Commission, working with Laura Camfield (EADI and the University of East Anglia, UK) and Cheikh M'Bow (Future Africa Programme, University of Pretoria, South Africa). The Commission arranged regular dialogue with the evaluation team, both at the inception and during the reporting phase.

[2] According to the evaluation (page 7), Danida ranks 11th out of 15 bilateral and multilateral agencies in terms of the total amounts provided for development research.

and performance monitoring. Yet even in the absence of a formal strategy, the multiple modalities implemented between 2008 and 2014 gave Danida a wider reach and profile in international relationships, and enabled it to move towards a much-appreciated "South-driven" and larger "programme" approach. Its responsiveness further helped to limit the effect of severe funding cutbacks in 2015, terminating several modalities but also accelerating efforts to move towards more South-driven projects oriented by the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The reversal back to Danish strategic interests in line with the 2017 development cooperation strategy, *The World 2030*, brings both risk and the potential benefit of sharing experiences in balancing interests and power asymmetries between Denmark and Southern partners. This will be increasingly important, given that control over most of the financial allocations as well as the lead research coordinators are still concentrated in Danish institutions. The loss of several modalities of support to international organisations as part of collective donor efforts has also eroded Denmark's soft power in the international research arena.

The sixteen overlapping themes in the research calls (2008-2018) fitted well with Danish expertise and societal values; it is therefore a pity that the grants have been managed as separate projects rather than portfolios with projects better connected into coherent bodies of knowledge, at intersections between food systems, nutrition, health, climate change and green growth. Although a majority of the projects addressed narrowly defined topics commonly found in international development, the value for was enhanced by the exploration of some "big picture" challenges as well as attempts to bring leading edge ideas to bear in low-income countries or regions.

The SDGs have been considered a priority since 2016, yet at project level linkages often appear contrived, and core concepts such as the indivisibility of the Global Goals, the need for transformation, working with a "complexity" lens, and focusing on inequality and "no-one left behind" have not received much attention; and gender remains surprisingly under-represented. At the same time, other important dynamics with the potential to affect development - such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, decolonisation debates and new models and narratives around "development" itself – have not had a sufficiently high profile.

Meeting key objectives

High quality research. The research supported by Danida was of high quality in terms of technical integrity, relevance and originality. This was confirmed by the very productive publication outputs and above-average citations and comes as no surprise, as the highly competitive FFU calls for proposals and assessment processes ensure that it is a low-risk portfolio: quality is the primary criterion for selection, and the competition is fierce.

The portfolio showed much strength in supporting a diversity of relevant problem-solving, context-specific projects that encouraged field experience, including in fragile contexts. But it was much lower with respect to the normative "research legitimacy" dimension in the RQ+ assessment framework, which incorporates gender-responsiveness, inclusiveness, alertness to negative consequences, engagement with local knowledge systems and openness to the voices and concerns of vulnerable populations. Multidisciplinary teams were also common in the more than 220 larger competitive partnership projects. But the need to integrate social science insights into health or natural science-focused projects was not always recognised. This might indicate insufficient awareness of the need for boundary-spanning scientists who can integrate disciplines

and apply systems approaches. The criteria used for assessing proposals thus also risk creating an imbalance between the "research" and "development" aspects of development research; raising the question of whether Danida might be at risk of supporting "research in developing countries" rather than "research for development."

Capacity development. As in previous decades, the most visible, significant contribution of Danida's financing has been support for basic use-focused, applied research capacities of Masters students (in earlier years), PhD students (many in professional capacities in academia or government), some postdoctoral fellows, and other researchers in low-income countries. The Danish research community also confirmed valuable benefits for Denmark: the opportunity to gain experience and contribute in places where making a difference really matters; enabling researchers to help solve "big picture" problems that affect the world and Denmark itself; and gaining essential new skills and insights about working in different cultures and challenging contexts. "Being Danish" has stood the research community in good stead, especially in the research partnerships and in the management of financial allocations; in both, Danish expertise and attitudes, as well as the opportunities provided to spend time in Denmark, have received much praise from Southern participants.

Danida has also benefitted from supporting institutional capacity development through the Building Stronger Universities (BSU) programme. Here too, Danida and DFC have shown sensitivity to the South, recognising the importance of Southern ownership and control. The way in which BSU phases II and III have been managed has much improved the chance of success. Inspiring results have been reported and observed, both in stronger, "richer" universities, and in strengthening institutional systems in weaker, less well-resourced ones.

However, Danida's grants are small, and collaboration and synergies with other research funders and even among the different Danida modalities have not been created. The sustainability of the results of the BSU efforts in weaker universities will require a full-fledged evaluation. A more nuanced perspective of "capacity development" might also be needed. This era demands urgent action, mastery of working with ecosystems, and "glocal" thinking. It also requires "boundary-spanning scholarship" that works across sector, geographic, demographic, stakeholder and ideological barriers, as well as engagement with the concept of "decolonization" of mindsets, and acceptance of new models and narratives for "development".

Towards development impact

The portfolio of grants has several features that support efforts to make a difference through research: problem-oriented, context-sensitive projects and practical fieldwork that engages potential beneficiaries and users. Some projects also focus on innovations that can assist societies in the South to leapfrog persistent development challenges. Danida's insistence that targeted communication is part of project responsibilities has led to admirable efforts to make research results known among potential users; the "positioning for use" dimension of the RQ+ assessment has received relatively high scores, indicating actionability, timeliness and a diversity of communication methods.

This strong focus on the dissemination of the results of research aimed at solving development problems has undoubtedly improved the chance of take-up and use of results in policy and practice, within the limitations faced by researchers in this regard. Encouraging uptake and the use of research results appears to work well in the immediate sphere of influence of single

projects. Few have reached national or international levels, or reached beyond the pilot stage. Also here, the different worlds of researchers, politicians, policymakers and business impede large-scale success.

It is no surprise that communication methods were often deficient. Problem statements were frequently not closely aligned with the most urgent or important priorities. Potential users were engaged relatively late. With few exceptions there is a lack of relationships or structures where findings can be shared in a systematic way. Many Danish embassies lack capacities and time to promote such efforts, although the new Window 2 modality, linked to the Strategic Sector Cooperation (SSC) initiatives, might get more attention from sector counsellors. Briefing materials and website content often appeared unappealing and too technical, unlikely to have effectively reached intended audiences. Nonetheless, while real impact on development - especially at scale - has seldom been achieved, research teams have done much that is valuable in national contexts, despite significant challenges and limited resources.

Influences on success

The evaluation identified a number of influences on Danida's efforts to support research in service of development. A framework has been developed to support the assessment and to highlight the importance of dealing with these influences when planning development research.

At least eight boundaries and imperatives shaping development research and its modalities of support have been important determinants of what Danida could do. Limitations have included diminishing expertise and resources in the MoFA, which have affected understanding of the relevance and usefulness of proposed projects; the extent to which it has been possible to align with, and support evolving Danish development cooperation efforts; and the limited size and unpredictability of the annual budget for development research. The evaluation team considers *The World 2030* as providing a fresh opportunity to establish a stable approach to development research over the next decade.

Two other important boundaries that have shaped the nature of the research and how it is supported are (i) Danida's efforts to maintain a balance between the interests of Denmark and its partners in the Global South, and (ii) the way in which development research has been conceptualised. The evaluation team found the latter to be too limited for the demands of an era defined by the Anthropocene, including climate change, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, shifting geopolitical power and highly intertwined global value chains, problems without borders, and the indivisible SDGs with their demand for transformation, integration, "no-one left behind" and rebalancing the relationship between humans and nature.

At least nine tensions were identified as a second set of influencing factors. Where the balance lies in each case is a matter of choice, something Danida has displayed through continuous evolution in its modalities over the years. Each has benefits as well as trade-offs that can be defended. Examples of tensions include: i) "freer" versus more directed research; ii) the interests of academia versus society; iii) concentration versus scattering of resources; iv) projects versus programmatic or portfolio approach; v) short versus long-term support; vi) collective versus unilateral or bilateral action; vii) strategic (business) interests versus the filling of important knowledge gaps; and, viii) convention and comfort versus new models and mindsets around development. Within some of these tensions lie decisions about risk: for example, in choosing

to support "winners" compared to less proven research groups or institutions, or investing in fragile versus more stable contexts.

Four important areas with strengths as well as weaknesses were also identified. Danida in collaboration with DFC and FFU have shown agility and responsiveness to changes in internal and external contexts, even though some researchers experienced this as creating unwarranted uncertainty. The thematic areas and filling of knowledge gaps relevant to national interests in the South have been well received and have been well aligned with broad policy imperatives in partner countries, even in the absence of systematic efforts in this regard. Yet individual projects seldom managed to address urgent or critical priorities at policy or business level. Alignment with the SDGs has often been superficially justified.

North-South partnerships were a significant strength, with many examples of highly productive relationships with many positive outcomes, but also signs of unequal power relations, poor institutional processes in recipient universities in the South and in Denmark, and misunderstandings based on different interpretations of dynamics in the very different cultures. Triangular partnerships have shown both what can go wrong – a cluster of projects running in parallel when there is too little in common – and what can be very beneficial when interests intersect, with South-South interactions showing new unexpected opportunities for learning in and about contexts more similar than what can be found in North-South collaborations alone.

Despite good potential to harness synergies within Danida's own portfolios, and with other donors, national partners and initiatives, there have been too few examples of connections that could bring greater coherence, complementarities and benefits. This has been exacerbated by Danida's withdrawal in 2015-2016 from international fora and from the collective support of international initiatives.

Organisation and management issues presented the final set of influences on progress and performance. Project delivery was almost consistently delayed, often because of systemic issues in the grant recipient organisations; a vast majority required no-cost extensions of, on average around a year and a half, indicating periods of support too short for the challenges research teams faced. The grants monitoring and evaluation system, though praised for being "light", was found to have limited utility, in particular with respect to aggregated descriptive, content and performance data that could be used for strategic portfolio planning and management, nuanced and in-depth accountability, knowledge generation and advocacy for development research.

Although the support system has a clear division in roles and responsibilities, some adjustments are necessary. Both DFC and EVAL (ELK) require more resources (financial or human) to ensure that they could fulfil the most effective roles in the system. The evaluation team would like to see some expansion in the role of DFC, and more focus on strategy, connections and evidence sharing with the Ministry by EVAL (ELK). Concerns have arisen about the stronger focus during assessment on the "research" rather than "development" aspects of proposals – an important issue that in the end affects the positioning of the research for development impact. Finally, the role of FFU is seen as crucial and in general very well executed. However, the need to ensure that "relevance" is treated on par with "quality", the new demands for expertise related to Window 2, and perceptions of potential conflicts of interest – even if just in terms of the optics of processes – require some reconsideration of its membership and ways of operating.

Recommendations and Options

The recommendations flowing from the findings have been structured around four options. They are not cast in stone, but are provided to stimulate discussion about possibilities for the future. Blending between them provide good alternatives too, while an explicit niche for Danish development research can be crafted from a focus on one or more thematic areas in line with the society's values and strengths combined with a specific way of working or modality of support, as noted for example in the four options that follow.

Option 1 - **Strengthening Core Capacities**, argues for maintaining the status quo in Window 1 and BSU by focusing on further strengthening of Danida's research support over several decades. This means developing individual and institutional research capacities to generate problem-solving knowledge of value to development. Based on weaknesses and opportunities identified during the evaluation, this option indicates six major areas for improvement, each with three practical actions. These are: (i) developing a strategy and portfolio approach; (ii) explicitly defining the concept of "development research" fit for this era; (iii) balancing short-term support with long-term field-building in critical areas; (iv) improving both the definition of, and criteria for assessing research quality while also attending to weaknesses in the 'legitimacy' dimension; (v) strengthening the monitoring and evaluation system to serve a more strategic accountability, knowledge building and advocacy function, and (vi) improving the development research system consisting of the key agencies EVAL/ELK, DFC and FFU with their links to the Ministry and its embassies. While much can be done with realignment of existing resources, some additional funding and time will be required for special studies and more use-focused working with evidence at a portfolio level.

While still building on the elements of Option 1, **Option 2 – Strengthening the Chance of Development Impact** shifts emphasis to how best to position the research supported by Danida to increase the chance that it will make a significant difference at a scale commensurate with national and even transnational interests. It proposes mechanisms to learn from experience as well as state of the art in how this is done, with additional resources for more systematic efforts to embed such approaches in the way that development research is done and supported.

Option 3 – Harnessing Research for Danish Development Cooperation argues for very close alignment with the spirit and actions of *The World 2030*, while avoiding pitfalls from past efforts to align development research with development cooperation. The focus will shift to a refined Window 2 that embodies support to selected middle income countries, while at the same time shifting to research in more fragile contexts through triangular cooperation and the formation of coalitions at a scale that can help diminish risk and increase the chance of impact and sustainability of results in challenging contexts. This option is a significant departure from the current approach, and will require significant commitment of expertise and resources by the research community as well as by MoFA, and in particular the embassies, to shape support in the interests of both Danish and Southern stakeholders in equal measure.

Option 4 – Partnering for Collective Power calls for a comprehensive shift away from bilateral support to initiating, participating in, and/or supporting international coalitions, partnerships and networks that work on transnational, regional and global issues - but with a special focus on the Global South. Returning to some of what was done in earlier modalities, it also opens new opportunities for participation in collective financing through funders' forums; for collective research action in support of global priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals; for South-based research coalitions; or for regional collaborative strategies linked to the

AU, the EU and the OECD for example, in which Southern and Danish researchers can participate. This option will require a radical shift away from what is done at present.

Management response and follow up

Introduction

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) welcomes the evaluation of support to development research, which has been conducted at an appropriate time for both examining the value of research funded since 2008 while also looking forward with proposals for achieving greater impact. The positive overall assessment of almost 2 billion DKK of research funding indicates that science-based insights and enhanced capacities involving Danish and overseas universities and research institutions play an important role in development processes. A wealth of valuable information and analyses of the results of funding development research are contained in the evaluation report and annexes.

Danida support for development research has been on a roller coaster ride over the years covered by the evaluation (2008-2018). In 2013-14 - around halfway through the period - the MoFA prepared and published a fully-fledged "strategic framework for development research." However, this framework was largely abandoned following the cutbacks in development assistance in 2015-16. In effect, Danida support for development research was "re-launched" in 2017 with the continuation of the Building Stronger Universities (BSU) programme in a third phase (2017-21) and with the setting up of two separate grant windows for research in "Danida priority countries" (window 1) and in "growth and transition countries" (window 2).

In responding to the evaluation it is important to acknowledge the efforts made by the independent Evaluation Commission which was set up to assist the MoFA in carrying out the assignment. Together with many researchers who have provided feedback on various draft documents, the Evaluation Commission has been instrumental in ensuring that the report and the annexes provide a very solid basis for consideration of future support.

Concerning the evaluation methods

Twenty evaluation questions were included in the terms of reference for the assignment, and the MoFA finds that the methods and analyses used by the evaluation team have been suitable and satisfactory as means of answering these. Overall, given the complexity and the scale of the task, it would appear that the evaluation findings are largely anchored in adequate and thorough data collection and assessment, including an online survey. The three country studies in Ghana, Uganda and Vietnam have also clearly provided the evaluation team with much useful information based on extensive interaction with research partners, including personnel and advisers at the Danish embassies and researchers at the universities. It is noted, however, that the study of research activities in Vietnam was disrupted by illness.

Triangulation between sources of information and methods of analysis enabled the evaluation team "to find patterns." However, it is acknowledged that the selected samples were small and that it was difficult to conduct in depth assessments of outcomes, particularly with respect to "the uptake, use and influence of the research results within and outside the scientific

environment."[3] Not surprisingly fading institutional memories are a problem in an evaluation covering over ten years. Nevertheless, the evaluation team has made efforts to participate in several consultative sessions arranged in the course of the assignment, including a well-attended, live-streamed meeting with researchers in early February 2020, at which the preliminary findings and options for the future were discussed.

Observations on the findings

A total of 80 findings are dealt with in the evaluation report. While it is not possible to respond to each and every finding, there are numerous issues highlighted in the evaluation which will be important to consider in determining the way forward, in particular:

- The question of balancing **research quality and relevance**, associated with the need for research based evidence to support the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the choice of main themes for research calls;
- How to enhance **capacity development** for improved research at institutions in the global south (notably in Africa), with a focus on supporting "south-driven" research and progressing beyond the current "building stronger universities" (BSU) initiative;
- How to expand and improve collaboration with other **international research funding partners**, including Nordic and European Union (EU) initiatives, the CGIAR[4], etc.;
- The importance of continued efforts to **position for use**, in other words to ensure that the evaluation team's criticism of the research "legitimacy dimension" (see above) is taken into account in seeking better research design and uptake.

These are briefly reviewed in the following observations.

Amongst the tensions and trade-offs that have been explored in the evaluation, finding the right balance between **research quality and relevance** is particularly important. The evaluation indicates that the scientific quality of the research funded by Danida – notably in terms of publications and citations – has been highly rated. However, while this dimension appears to have been emphasized for example in the selection of projects for funding, the production of useful knowledge that can be applied to solve development problems may have been assigned less importance.

The way in which research is related to the sustainable development goals is also criticized in the evaluation. It seems that not much attention has been given to the "indivisibility of the goals", to the need for global, comprehensive transformation in the context of climate change, technological innovation, etc., nor to the challenges of both working with complexity and focusing on social and economic equality ("leaving no-one behind"). Thus, there may be a need to re-consider how research programmes and projects are designed with respect to the SDGs.[5]

This is also reflected in the choice of different themes for the research calls and the problem of "research project fragmentation" that is mentioned in the evaluation. The need to enhance cross-disciplinary research into development problems is also underlined and a case is made for connecting projects "into coherent bodies of knowledge" through a portfolio approach. In the

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[3] A "dedicated outcomes evaluation" is proposed as a further step in strategic planning.
[4] The international food and agriculture research partnership, funded by Danida in the past.
[5] Expanding "sustainability science for the SDGs" is the theme of a recent briefing by Prof. Katherine Richardson: "Hvordan skaber vi bæredygtig udvikling for alle? (Informations forlag, 2019).

most recent call for proposals - for research grants to be approved at the end of 2020 - steps have been taken to tackle these problems by focusing on climate change as the single "unifying and over-arching" theme.

Turning to the assessment of **capacity building through development research**, the generally very positive evaluation of the approaches adopted over the past ten years is acknowledged. Survey respondents have clearly indicated that capacity development through, inter alia, targeted courses, collaboration on research projects, international networking and partnerships and so on have all been highly beneficial. The evaluation report includes a long list of "intangible outcomes", such as methodological practices, leadership, publishing, language skills, theoretical knowledge and project management. It is also noted that capacity development is a two way process; in other words the capacities of Danish researchers have also been developed alongside those of partners in the global south.

The MoFA also welcomes the observation that the BSU programme "is widely perceived among stakeholders as a growing success." Some effort has been devoted to examining the outcomes of the three phases of the programme since it began in 2011, including consultations with many researchers involved in both Ghana and Uganda as well as in Denmark. The importance of leadership "buy in" for the success of the programme is emphasized as well as the "unexplored potential" of more extensive south-south collaboration. Consideration is given to the important question of whether to focus the limited resources on smaller, newer and weaker universities (such as Gulu in northern Uganda and the State University of Zanzibar) or on the more established "winners" (such as KCMC and SUA in Tanzania or the University of Ghana) where researchers are generating internationally recognized results and knowledge.

Findings 64 to 67 concern the coherence, synergy and harmonisation of **international research** support. In general there are few examples mentioned of successful collaboration between researchers working in similar fields but funded from different sources and it would appear that coordination between donors funding research projects is the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, the evaluation team notes that "Danida's withdrawal from collective support to international programmes in 2015 diminished opportunities for harmonization […] among Nordic countries, the EU and further afield." Looking to the future, in some countries there are research coordination initiatives and there are also various joint funding programmes such as the African science granting councils initiative. In short, there are some opportunities for enhancing coherence and harmonization, together with the Nordic agencies, the EU and possibly also private foundations, that could be explored in the follow up.

The findings pertaining to **positioning for use** of research outcomes are particularly important. There are some interesting examples outlined in the report of researchers who have thought about dissemination of results and have used effective communication techniques, but there is also criticism of "poor timing and inappropriate materials" used in many attempts to influence policy makers.[6] Furthermore, aligning development research and development assistance is surprisingly complicated and there are many difficulties to be faced in efforts to ensure that research results inform and influence development practices and policies. Over the years there have been a number of success stories, but also "disconnections."

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[6] The impact of the well-known Bandim health project in Guinea-Bissau in terms of childhood vaccination strategies and other outcomes is mentioned in the evaluation, which also highlights a number of other successful "high impact" projects in a range of countries including Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Vietnam.

The approach that has been adopted since 2017 through the research window 2, closely linked to the strategic sector cooperation (SSC) agreements with a number of agencies (and Danish Embassies) in selected countries, is an attempt to ensure that research results are readily applicable through rapid uptake. The shorter time horizon (3 year grants) and the specificity of research themes have facilitated this. But the boundaries between research and consultancies or R&D for product testing appear to have become blurred in this process.

A particularly serious concern emerged from the "RQ+" assessment of the legitimacy dimension. The evaluation team found that overall research projects scored low on important questions pertaining to marginalization and vulnerable populations, to inclusiveness and gender responsiveness, to "negative consequences" (the possible risks of research) as well as to engagement with local and indigenous knowledge. That research projects are often "gender blind" is a significant finding, which will require further response in the follow up to the evaluation. Similarly, given the importance of human rights in development, ensuring the inclusiveness of research processes will also require a renewed effort.

Finally, the arrangements for the **management and organization** of Danida support for development research are also considered in the evaluation. While the day-to-day administration of the research grants and the organization of the application and progress reporting systems are found to be satisfactory, there is some concern about the "strategic management", i.e. using the "data and information that support planning, decision-making and advocacy around development research." In addition to making a strong case for the preparation of a new overall strategy for Danida support to development research, it is argued that there is a need for better monitoring to track progress and performance. Systematic learning from development research may be enhanced by the recent reorganization of the MoFA, through the new department for Evaluation, learning and quality (ELK). Other improvements could be considered, including updating the composition and functioning of the consultative committee (FFU) and further engaging with other institutions in the research support system (including the Innovation Fund).

Recommendations and follow up

As outlined above the evaluation concludes with consideration of some recommendations and options for the future. In following these up, the MoFA will consider the future strategy for support to development research, in order to respond to the opportunities, tensions and trade-offs identified. It will also be important to renew and improve the management and strategic tracking of funds allocated for development research in collaboration between the MoFA, DFC and the consultative committee (FFU). As noted above, the creation of an Evaluation, learning and quality (ELK) department offers a potential platform for further enhancing research design, the choice of themes and the uptake and use of research results.

However, it is also important to recognize resource limitations, notably insofar as involvement in research processes by staff at Danish embassies is concerned. In this context and while recognizing the role to be played by targeted research in connection with Strategic sector cooperation (SSC) in a number of countries, the MoFA does not envisage a major shift towards the Window 2 modality (described in option 3). Revision of the development and humanitarian strategy ("the World 2030") would also imply that this option is not currently preferred. Modified priorities affecting the choice of research themes are also likely in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact in regions where the weak health care systems of fragile states may be seriously affected.

A new strategy for support to development research will be based on the ambitious high impact proposals for strengthening research capacities at selected African universities (in a "post-BSU" modality) combined with further competitive funding of research within agreed priority themes, more or less as envisaged in the proposals to build on "core capacities" and strengthen impact. This could be linked to targeted support for selected research activities in connection with the SSC programme, but limited to priority themes, together with targeted support for specific international partnerships and coalitions.

A scoping analysis will be conducted in order to ensure that the re-designed research support programme includes coherent collaboration arrangements with other Nordic and European donors, as well as to explore potential links with private sector foundations, which are also providing funds for thematic research in environment, health and other sectors. New partnerships based on selected priority research themes could also involve specialist non-governmental organisations in Denmark as well as international coalitions (such as the CGIAR). Opportunities for Danish researchers to participate in international programmes will be explored, aiming to ensure that development research continues to attract young, globally-minded problem solvers.

ELK, May 2020